

Radio & Social Media Content Integrations - Perceived Effects on Listeners: An Indian Perspective

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Abstract

This study examined the perceived effects of radio and social media content integration in an Asian context. Radio, popularly known as the traditional aural medium quickly adapted itself to the changes brought in by the social media revolution. The arrival of audio sources like Sound Cloud, Spotify etc. has further enhanced the listening experience on social media and other on-line platforms with provisions for instant feedback and reach. Content Integration is rapidly gaining importance as an alternative method of revenue generation in FM radio stations around the world. Sales messages are camouflaged into the jock talk without the listener even realizing that it carries an element of advertising. Studies related to audience reception analysis in Radio studies are common while empirical studies pertaining specifically to content is still an under-studied area. Adopting a qualitative research technique, this paper employing the focus group method attempted to understand and analyze social media content integrations on FM radio stations in India and its effects on listeners.

Key Words: Content Integrations, Radio and Social Media, Invisible, Visible traditional Medium.

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Introduction

FM radio stations which were earlier dependent on direct ad spots as the only source of revenue generation are now expanding to activations and social media content integrations. Social Media Content Integrations are rapidly gaining importance as an alternative method of revenue generation in FM radio stations around the world. Content Integrations can be defined as those show property's where the message of the client is integrated seamlessly into the show content. It can also be direct or indirect references to brands along with the jock talk. Content Integrations can also be integrated along with music which is popularly known as "song tagging" in FM radio stations.

Social Media Content Integrations in radio shows seem to be a regular feature on prime-time slots. FM radio stations market content integrations as an effective and efficient way to reach the target group of the clients. Content Integrations mostly attack the listener at a subliminal level.

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The advent of social media has altered the traditional modes of radio broadcast in ways

unimaginable. The traditional medium of radio has been termed as “a pioneer in embracing new ways of connecting with its audiences”. (Hendy 2000, Rhoads 1993 as cited in Zelenkauskaitė, 2015) The erstwhile top-down approach gave way to the bottom-up approach where the listeners could respond and initiate conversations about radio shows on social media instantaneously. Historically, radio had its own limitations due to “technological constraints”, like the listeners were unable to use their own radio set “to provide their feedback through two-way interaction”. (Zelenkauskaitė, 2015) With the arrival of digital media, the levels of participation increased manifold and the listeners were able to participate in real time radio and social media integrations.

Radio stations which were previously engaged with the social media only for brand promotions extended to engaging the listeners with content integrations, special contests and also creation of fan pages for on-air talents. The traditional radio’s social media integration has not only helped the stations but also the listeners. Radio listeners are “*no longer alone and invisible*”. (Bonini, 2015) Social media integrations provide them with “*a variety of social circles*”. (Bonini, 2015). Marwick, (2013) observes that the listeners of radio shows on social media get exposed to various marketing strategies like “*micro-celebrity, life streaming and self-branding- a strategy of success in which one thinks of oneself as a brand and uses social media to promote it, through creating, presenting and maintaining it.*”

The social media content integrations have also evolved into a mechanism of audience measurement for many radio stations. The responses to specific radio shows could be traced easily. The qualitative measurement of listeners in terms of their responses to radio shows could also be easily gauged. “*Listeners are not only numbers; their feelings, opinions and reputations are traceable and measureable*” (Kozinets, 2010).

Rainie and Wellman, (2012) observed that listeners that are connected to radio shows on social media are empowered to “*project their voices to more extended audiences*”.

Ferguson et al., 2011 examined the manner in which radio stations in the US use the social media platform, Twitter. Findings of the study revealed that there was only a weak correlation between the stations’ average quarter hour share and the number of followers of the stations twitter handle. Music stations had more promotional tweets while news stations provided more news items for their audience.

The study further notes that radio stations have more readily accepted and adopted the use of the Internet. It was found that music stations are finding more followers with promotional tweets. News stations build their following on Twitter with tweets that update news items to their audience. It can be argued that the radio has much greater potential to increase its use of Twitter to reach existing and potential audiences that are more mobile than television viewers.

Lestari et al., 2017 focused on how the usage of social media by teenage –segmented private commercial radio supported Public Relations activities. The target sample chosen was aware about the social media functions in their radio stations. Communication using social media internally and externally has resulted in escalating interactions with listeners, users and even with the internal staff of the radio station.

The findings of the study revealed that most radio stations use Twitter more than Facebook. Social Media has become a functional tool to support sales, marketing and public relations programmes in addition to on-air and off-air programmes.

Bonini, 2014 focused on the changes the radio listening public have undergone since society started to use social media, in particular Facebook and the change in the publicness of

public. The paper also noted how the speaker to listener relationship and the listener-to-listener one has been affected. Before social media, there was no guarantee of the response as it was through post. But with the invention of mobile phones, e-mail, internet streaming, blogs and social media the communication flow has been reversed, re-establishing a balance in favor of the public. With social networking sites there is a paradigmatic change in the relation between radio and its audience.

(Zelenkauskaitė and Simoes, 2014) examined the radio social media integrations on social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Google+. The findings revealed that Facebook was the most preferred social media platform for radio listeners “indicating socio-technical differences in their adoption by radio stations” and on the other hand “technical constraints of content access”.

Jenkins, (2006) in his research notes that participation in digital media space also empowers audience members to be “co-creators” and it gives rise to a “prosumer culture”. While the audience members are engaging with the social media content integrations by initiating discussions on show topics they also contribute in creating content for the radio station.

Carpentier, (2007) through his Access, Interaction and Participation model, proposed different levels of audience interaction. He distinguished between production and reception and noted four levels of progression in participation. The first level pertains to access, the second level refers access and ability to receive content, the third level concerns itself with interaction and the fourth level deals with participation. The levels from 1-3 discuss the various dynamics of power relations and co-creation. The fourth level gives a critical view of participation, wherein he differentiates between the right to create or engage with the content and the choices given to the listeners in decision making.

While most of the studies glorify the idea of radio and social media content integrations there are some studies which also warns us as about some underlying problems.

Zelenkauskaitė, (2015) in her study on Radio Audience interaction emphasizes upon the “*diverse needs that listeners have across platforms*”. The study revealed that the listeners interact with other listeners irrespective of the programme on-air time and with the “absence of unified access to all platforms as a way to interact with radio content”, the author warns that such social media integrations may lead to “isolated islands of space” which in turn may “segregate users rather than uniting them”.

Bonini, (2015) observes that listener participation in social media “can be a source of exploitation” and also supports the “Marxist criticism of exploitation of content generated by networked publics”.

Jedrzejewski and Oliveira, (2015) note that radio acts as a “space” for different kinds of listeners to come together to exchange their views, ideas and opinions. Listeners while talking to radio hosts do not just have a conversation with the hosts but “listeners actually talk to each other, feeding into a sense of community”. The authors also emphasize that the relationship between the radio producers and listeners are “intimate” which “contributes to the feeling of belonging to a group”.

Castells, (2001) observes that communities of listeners can be strengthened with social media as it simplifies the process of their interpersonal communication.

Based on a literature survey, the researcher framed the following objectives for this study.

Objectives

To examine the nature of listener engagement on radio social media content integrations.

To understand the attitude of listeners towards radio social media content integrations.

Research Questions

Do listeners prefer listening to radio shows on social media?

What kind of audio sources do the listeners prefer to tune-in for radio social media content integrations?

What gratifications do they seek while listening to radio social media content integrations?

Do listeners prefer the invisible traditional radio medium over the visible radio social medium?

Methodology

The study using the Qualitative approach, examined the nature of radio listeners on social media. The motivations of radio listeners for participating in radio shows through social media were analyzed in this study. Using purposive sampling technique, the respondents were selected. The sample for the study consisted of young adults belonging to the age group of 19-25. The respondents selected were graduate and postgraduate students. The focus group method was used to collect the data. The focus group respondents were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

The respondents had to be listeners / followers of radio social media pages.

The respondents should've interacted with show hosts on the radio social media page at least once.

Two separate focus group sessions were conducted. Each focus group session comprised of 8 participants and it lasted for almost an hour. The moderator initiated the focus group discussions and the responses of the participants were documented. The focus group discussion started with the moderator explaining about radio and social media content integrations. The pros and cons of radio on social media platforms were discussed. No rewards or credits of any form were given to any of the participants. The respondents participated in Focus Group Discussions out of their own free will by responding to the researcher's call. The responses were then analyzed qualitatively.

Data Analysis

Do listeners prefer listening to radio shows on social media?

A majority of the respondents prefer listening to radio shows on social media as they feel that it gives them the liberty to tune in and at the same time interact with their favorite on-air personalities. They also feel that on social media they could also read the theme of the social fabric when they tune in anytime and then participate. Respondents feel that "at times it becomes convenient to construct their thoughts and send messages through social media rather than being live on-air on phone". A majority of respondents were excited and thrilled with the idea of radio content integrations on social media citing that they do not have to wait for their call to be connected to request for their favourite songs. They would just have to type in their favourite song on the social media page and the show personalities simply play their favourite numbers. While the respondents expressed their preference, they also pointed out that whether it is social

media content integrations or traditional radio shows, they would listen to it only if the content is relevant. However, one respondent felt that respondent is “cautious about the data pack”. Therefore, respondent would first prefer reading the text and then listening to the audio based on the duration. But the respondent says that “she would rather prefer listening to it on their website or on their radio apps.”

A majority of the respondents feel that one can reach out to a larger group on social media than radio stations. However one respondent feels that radio has better reach than an online medium. She says that she is not sure if most people who listen to radio are on social media. “Demographic matters” – for instance, someone who listens to the radio in a teashop in a remote village may not be on social media – his only access therefore be the radio itself.

A majority of respondents feel that interaction on social media is easier as you can express your feelings—“like” or share the post/audio. She says, “I want my opinion to be there but I don’t want to be heard.” However one respondent prefers to call on air on radio over typing a comment on social media. She says that her comments might get lost amongst the many conversations. A majority of respondents feel that there is a lot of excitement when you talk to the RJ over the phone but when you type it out you might miss out on that excitement. However, one says that the advantage on typing is that you have enough time to think and write the comments and if you don’t like it you can delete or edit it. Few respondents felt that they become conscious when they speak over phone and hence they prefer radio social media content integrations.

What kind of audio sources do the listeners prefer to tune into for radio social media content integrations?

A majority of the respondents were aware of audio sources including Sound Cloud, Planet radiocity.com and Mirchi.com. However they were not aware of Audio Boom.

What gratifications do they seek while listening to radio social media content integrations?

Few respondents do point out that human connection is lost when one is messaging on Facebook. They noted that it could be anyone who is sending a reply to the comments posted. However, a majority of respondents opine that RJs do take time and effort to reply to comments and suggestions – perhaps not to everyone but at least to a few people.

A respondent says that she consumes social media visually or for reading articles. “I don’t click an audio unless I know for sure what it is,” she says. Another respondent says “we are used to consuming content visually but in a few years’ time things could change, like the preference of podcast.”

In terms of contests, most respondents said that participating in contests online (on social media) is easier and convenient as everyone is connected to social media. Respondents highlighted that in traditional media you have to keep calling, sometimes the lines might not connect and you tend to then give up. However on social media you can just post or update or tag. A respondent felt that one of the benefits is that a person can avoid making a fool of themselves over calls to radio stations (live shows with RJ), especially when everyone is listening. On social media your post gets covered among many posts (from various contestants) and also you can easily Google for answers. Respondents felt that peer group participation is also evident on social media. When a friend is tagged in a contest or when he/she shares the photos or posts them, they are likely to reach out to many to gain support from fellow friends.

Respondents feel that promos online wouldn’t motivate them to go back online and listen

to the audio. However, a majority of respondents felt that they would go back and listen if the gifts are interesting (like the gold coins). A majority of respondents felt that gifts, vouchers and free movie tickets etc, are a real motivation for them to tune in to radio shows on social media.

With reference to brand integrations on social media radio shows, a majority of the respondents did not attach much importance or interest in sales messages on social media radio shows. Respondent observed that only if the jingle/promo/teaser is catchy it stays in your head. However another respondent says that it is irritating to hear brand names in between songs. “The essence of the songs is lost,” she says. A Respondent also pointed out that listening to same brand name again and again is irritating. Almost all respondents agreed to this. One respondent reacted very strongly saying that “It brings hatred towards the product. The next time I see the product I might tear it apart,” he says.

Do listeners prefer the invisible traditional radio medium over the visible radio social medium?

A majority of respondents had mixed feelings when it comes to preference for the visible social medium. They would still prefer the invisible traditional medium. Some prefer the anonymity it offers. They prefer the anonymity for on-air talents as well as themselves as show participants. They reveal that with the profiles of the participants going on line, the anonymity factor is lost.

Respondents observed that the charm of the medium is the voice, if the mystery can be maintained then the charm is maintained. Respondents felt that it doesn’t matter to them “what RJ looks like the voice persona matters”. However, one respondent says that physical appearance adds more charm to the interaction. “It is very important to know the RJ so the interaction becomes more personal”. Another respondent noted that “it is the RJ’s freedom or the station’s prerogative to decide if they want to them to be known publicly or not”.

Respondents feels that there is some perception about RJs being good looking which is judged based on their voices—this is because voice is the main element that is attractive.

A majority of respondents felt that as compared to social media there is low interaction on Radio channels. They felt that a listener will have to “call and wait for the response, they might even put you on hold. And there will be a lot of people trying to call the station thereby jamming the lines. However, on social media you can interact with the RJ”. A Respondent however says that she has a play list on her phone and she would prefer listening to it rather than listening to the radio unless they come up with something interesting.

Conclusion

The study examined the radio social media integrations and the listener’s attitude towards such content integrations among the age group of 19-25. This particular age group was selected based on the understanding that they are pro-active users of social media. Radio, generally known for its invisibility or anonymity factor is shedding its veil with the help of social media integrations by becoming more visible in terms of uploading most of its content on social media. The study reveals that majority of the listeners have accepted the social media content integrations and are impressed with the idea of listening to radio shows on social media. Social media lets the listeners to stay in touch with on-air talents anytime which otherwise was dependent on how lucky they got in terms of call connectivity. The findings of the study also

point to the increasing presence of brand integrations which seems to be a major deterrent for the pleasure of listening. Traditionally, the radio is known for building a community of anonymous listeners where they meet, share and greet on air and dedicate songs to each other. The findings of the study reveal that the social media has further enhanced this concept of community building of listeners. The “theatre of the mind concept” of radio is diminishing gradually with radio and social media integrations where the identity of the on-air talents are too often exposed. The old world charm of knowing your on-air talent only through his or her voice and imagining his appearance according to the listener’s whims and fancies is becoming a thing of the past. One may argue that eventually the decision of the identity exposure of the on-air talent should be left to their choice. Considering the nature of the aural medium and its magical properties it would only be appropriate to conclude that radio should never attempt to evolve itself into a hybrid visual radio medium whereby its uniqueness of anonymity, topicality and the theatre of the mind would be at stake.

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